

AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES

December 9, 2010

Bangs Community Center: Room 101

Members Present: Daniel Clapp, Joan Golowich, Joel Gordon, Rosemary Kofler, Kathy Koplow, Mary Jane Laus, Barbara Sutherland, Jack Wollensak

Other: Doris Holden (Treasurer of Friends of Amherst SC)

Absent: Juana Trujillo

Select Board Liaison: Stephanie O'Keeffe absent

Staff Present: Nancy Pagano (Director/Program Director), Maura Plante (Assistant Director/Services), Karen Erman (Administrative Assistant)

Guests: Ron Bohonowicz (Facilities Director), Christine Brestrup (Planning Dept), Alan Snow (Tree Warden), Laura Fitch (Co-housing Architect), Scott Merzbach (Gazette Reporter), Bessie Young, Alan Root, Lillian Scott

Welcome: Dan Clapp, Chair, called the Council on Aging meeting to order at 9:06 AM.

Nancy introduced **Bessie Young**, graduating senior at Amherst College. Bessie continues to be an amazing and devoted volunteer who has helped the Senior Center in so many ways. She has linked us up with other students at Amherst College, has helped with fundraising for the Friends, has been vital to Maura with the placement of students in the Friendly Visitor program, and has organized the numerous intergenerational dinners. Nancy praised Bessie for her enormous contribution to seniors.

Minutes of Previous Meeting: The minutes of the Oct. 14, 2010 meeting were approved and accepted.

Friends' Treasurer Report:

Doris provided a handout showing \$11,091.54 in the checking account and \$77,185.85 in the investment account, plus a CD worth \$10,000.

Karen stated that since July, 2010 the Friends has received \$6,340.89 of which \$3586 came in just in the last month since the solicitation letter went out in the newsletter.

The Treasurer's report was approved and accepted.

NEW BUSINESS

Budget: John Musante was unable to report due to illness.

Senior Parking Idea:

Nancy stated that parking for elders in Amherst is a challenge, particularly for those who want to participate in Senior Center activities, volunteer or shop. In the lot closest to Bangs the elder must get out of the car, find a pay machine, fumble for coins, then return to the car with the ticket. Weather conditions contribute to the impediment and keep seniors away from the Senior Center. Nancy referred to the handout about parking for seniors in Newton MA. Seniors over 65 purchase a parking sticker from the Town for \$6 per year, which provides them with unlimited parking at most short-term meters. That system has worked well in Newton for several years. It could be a solution for Amherst seniors. Nancy spoke with John Musante who had another idea – valet parking done by trained senior volunteers for other seniors, thereby using the lower level of the parking garage which is intimidating to many elders.

Joel Gordon, Jack Wollensak, Dan Clapp and Alan Root will serve on a parking sub-committee and investigate other ideas for the parking situation.

CONTINUING BUSINESS

Senior Co-Housing Presentation:

Laura Fitch gave a Power Point presentation, emphasizing the points she talked about at the November COA meeting. She advocates Senior Co-housing as "one of the choices" available to seniors in our community. Co-housing is a housing development that encourages interaction between neighbors who share some common facilities (a great room, a common kitchen, meeting rooms, guest rooms, perhaps a workshop). Residents design, help develop, manage and maintain it. On-going decisions are made by consensus. Residents generally own their homes. It is intended to provide privacy with 'community' at the doorstep. It is not intended to be "assisted living" or co-caring, although residents may help one another in the short-term. Their skills are valued and shared.

She reiterated the main reasons seniors choose co-housing: health & a more active life style, security and safety, community, to avoid burden on children, eating together, less impact on the planet, being with kindred spirits, general maintenance, appropriate size house, and financial good sense.

The power point contained photos of the four senior co-housing complexes in the U.S.

Nancy asked Laura to keep us informed of her progress in starting senior co-housing in Amherst.

Laura would like to get started by forming a Study Group in Amherst in the next year. She would also like to get a grant to help pay for that. Nancy suggested putting articles in our newsletter.

Update on Recent Senior Spirit Survey:

Alan Root called the survey "a starter". Discussions with about 40 seniors disclosed several possible ways to improve life for seniors at the center. **1) Improved Communications Among Seniors** through email, posters in medical offices and churches, and social interaction. **2) Asian, African-American, Spanish-Speaking Seniors** – explore ethnic group interest in games, trips, food. **3) Monthly Potluck** **4) Computer Choices** – help seniors learn how to use email, set up a blog or share photos with family members. **5) Weekly Education Class** on topics of interest or importance (such as avoiding falls or safe driving) using our new wide-screen TV.

Nancy thanked Alan for his input. She said that some of the suggestions are already underway and a potluck is being planned.

Landscaping Work Update:

Christine Brestrup introduced **Ron Bohonowicz**, Director of Schools and Facilities, who is working with the DPW on the landscape design for the front area of Bangs. Ron will present the revised design to the Planning Board for approval on January 5, 2011 at 7:05 PM.

Ron described the process of planning for the project. His original plan was met with disapproval by the Planning Board because the Tree Warden recommended saving the trees that Ron had planned to remove. Technically the trees are on our property and Ron could have them removed but that is not the behavior Ron would like to exhibit from the Town's perspective. He wants to work together with others and create an atmosphere in which we can all coexist. Ron's first concern was the safety of the walkway. He put up some fencing to protect people from tripping and falling. (He plans to replace the tall iron fence with a more attractive lower green fencing). He also had the pavers on the walkway to the door reset to create a smooth surface. Ron presented the following new design to the DPW this week:

- poured concrete from the front entrance to the road
- create a ramp for the van to load and unload a wheelchair
- bring in a walkway from the Ann Whalen area to come across the patio
- move benches and place them under the overhead
- move bike rack to the opposite side, making space for another small bench
- remove three of the trees, the one closest to Rao's and the two close to the center front entrance

One of the major issues addressed in the new design is that there can be no more than a 5% grade from the front door to the curb. Currently the grade is greater than that. Ron will need to request additional funds from the Town for the new design. He expects the project will be completed next summer.

Dan emphasized that the safety of seniors is far more important than the saving of trees.

Rosemary asked how the uplifting by tree roots could be prevented when the new pavement is in place.

Alan Snow stated that the tree roots were not the cause of any of the current uplifting on the pavers in question. It was caused by freeze/thaw and normal wear and tear over time. The reason tree roots lift pavement is they are looking for oxygen and water. Alan emphasized the importance of trees to maintain the character of the community. Trees do require maintenance but they do clean the air that we breathe. He invited people to join the Shade Tree Committee in Town.

Ron said that if it becomes clear that the tree roots do begin to show uplifting, they would deal with the trees and prune roots as necessary. "There is some heaving out there now, but the roots are a problem too".

Christine added that the concrete will be 'reinforced' concrete which is much more resistant to root damage. Any further comments by the COA should be addressed to the Planning Board before January 5. They can be sent through Christine.

Friends Update:

Rosemary said the date is set for the *Second Annual Amherst Follies* for Sunday, May 1, 2011 at 2:00 PM. The Friends approved the purchase of new light-weight, yet very durable, aircraft aluminum tables for the large activity room. They will replace the tables that have been repaired numerous times yet are still falling apart and are unsafe. The cost will be about \$3000. The Friends also unanimously approved supporting Karen's salary with the \$4000 that would have to be cut due budget cuts for 2012.

SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATE

Ad Hoc COA Survey:

Dr. Randall Stokes gave a five-minute presentation to Town Meeting on November 8. Randall spoke about the six areas of concern covered in the survey. He stressed the fact that the Senior Center is widely utilized. In fact, three fourths of those over 75 have used the center. He also stressed that those who use the center are very happy with the programs and services offered.

SHAG (Senior Health Advisory Group):

Dan was unable to attend the last meeting. An on-going concern and project revolves around opening up more opportunities for young people to volunteer in services to seniors.

Highland Valley Elder Services:

Joan reported on the last meeting. The new Director gave a power point presentation on the implementation of "Community First", which focuses on how to keep seniors in declining health at home rather than going to a nursing home.

STAFF REPORTS

Maura:

There have been no new calls for money from the **Emergency Fund** for fuel and heating assistance. There should be sufficient money in that fund for the year.

Maura got a phone call from an elder who praised two Amherst College students from the **Friendly Visitor** program. They went above and beyond what was required of them – even invited him out to dinner and concerts. He so thoroughly enjoyed the company of those students from Lisa Raskin's Psychology of Aging class. The elder wrote to Dr. Raskin expressing his gratitude and praise for the students.

Nancy:

There has been such a huge demand for items from our **Convalescent Closet** that we are often without wheelchairs or other equipment. An opportunity arose for us to purchase two 'like new' wheelchairs for the price of one. The Friends approved the purchase.

Last year the cost for **Thanksgiving Dinner** at the Senior Center was greater but we had more donations to cover the costs. This year we had more people donating but in smaller amounts, thus we were \$209.00 in the red. There were 30 home-delivered meals (similar to last year) and 50 eating at the center.

Office changes will take place in January. The Health Department Administrative Assistant will move back to the Health Department. That office will become the Copy Room. The current Copy Room will then become the Health Department clinic space.

The COA meeting adjourned at 10:40 AM.

The next meeting of the COA will be held on February 10, 2011 at 9:00 AM at the Bangs Community Center.

Respectfully submitted,
Rosemary Kofler, Secretary

The approved minutes of the October 14, 2010 meeting were delivered to the Select Board Office to be filed.

**Council on Aging
December 9, 2010
Bangs Community Center: Room 101**

Document List

The following documents were made available to all members of the COA during the meeting. They are available for review at the Amherst Senior Center, 70 Boltwood Walk, Amherst, MA.

1. Meeting Agenda
2. Minutes of November 14, 2010 Meeting
3. Friends of the Amherst Senior Center Treasurer's Report
4. Friends of the Amherst Senior Center Board Meeting Minutes of December 3, 2010
5. Friends of the Amherst Senior Center Board of Directors contact list
6. City of Newton, MA - Regulations for Senior Citizens Sticker Parking
7. Creative Directions for Amherst Senior Center based on Survey by Alan Root
8. Senior Health Services Log by Lisa White for October
9. Senior Health Services Log by Lisa White for November